

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group Support



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USFWS Office of Subsistence Management
Fishery Information Service Division

By
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ABSTRACT

The Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group (Working Group) was formed in 1988 by the Alaska Board of Fisheries in response to requests from people in the Kuskokwim Area who wanted to take a more active role in the management of their salmon (*Oncorhynchus*) fishery resources. Since then the Working Group has become increasingly active in the preseason, inseason, and postseason management of the Kuskokwim River drainage subsistence, commercial, and sport salmon fisheries. The Working Group now serves as a public forum for fisheries managers to meet with local users of the salmon resource to review run assessment information and reach a consensus on how to proceed with management of Kuskokwim River salmon fisheries. The Working Group typically first meets in March or April each calendar year; has intensive and frequent meetings during June, July, and August; and has a wrap-up session in September or October. Fishery Information Services (FIS) Study 01-116 funds a Working Group Coordinator position, Working Group meeting costs, travel for Working Group members to attend appropriate salmon-related meetings, and costs related to keeping appropriate government agencies, non-government organizations, and the public informed about Kuskokwim salmon management meetings, issues, and actions.

KEY WORDS: chinook salmon, chum salmon, coho salmon, commercial fishery, cooperative management, Kuskokwim River, *Oncorhynchus keta*, *Oncorhynchus kisutch*, *Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*, subsistence fishery, Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge, Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group.

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INTRODUCTION

Since time immemorial people have engaged in subsistence salmon (*Oncorhynchus*) fishing activities on the Kuskokwim River in southwestern Alaska. This practice continues into the present time, and from late May through mid-August, many households are involved in harvesting, processing, and preserving salmon for subsistence use (Table 1). The seasonal movement of families, from permanent winter communities to summer fish camps situated along rivers and sloughs, continues to be a significant element of the annual subsistence harvest effort. Approximately 1,100 households on the Kuskokwim River annually harvest salmon for subsistence use. Many other households, which are not directly involved in catching salmon, participate by assisting family and friends with cutting, drying, smoking, and associated preservation activities: salting, canning, and freezing. The subsistence salmon fishery on the Kuskokwim River is one of the largest and most important in the state. Studies on the river indicate that fish contribute as much as 85% of the total pounds of fish and wildlife harvested in a community annually, and salmon as much as 53% of the total annual harvest. The harvest of salmon for subsistence use is as much as 650 pounds per capita in some Kuskokwim River communities (Burkey et al. 2002).

In the late 1800's the commercial harvest of salmon in the river began (Burkey et al. 2002). As subsistence and commercial use of the salmon resource escalated through time, the need for more intensive management arose. At Statehood in 1959, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) began managing the subsistence and commercial harvests of this salmon resource (Naske 1973). In 1988, the Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group (Working Group) was formed by the Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF) to foster public involvement in salmon management. Specifically, the Working Group goal was to increase the sustained yield of salmon stocks to provide for subsistence needs and a viable commercial fishery. In 1999, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) began managing subsistence salmon fishing in the waters of the Kuskokwim River that flow through the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge (Burkey et al. 2002). Subsequently, USFWS Office of Subsistence Management (OSM) funding was provided through Fishery Information Services (FIS) Study 01-116 to foster this complex management scheme.

This FIS funding has enhanced the Working Group's role in the preseason, inseason, and postseason cooperative management with fishery managers of the subsistence, commercial, and sport salmon fisheries in the Kuskokwim River drainage. The Working Group serves as a public forum for fisheries managers to meet with local users of the salmon resource to review run assessment information and reach a consensus on how to proceed with management of the salmon resource. In 2001 and 2002 this cooperative management scheme was guided by the Kuskokwim River Salmon Rebuilding Management Plan (Rebuilding Plan) (5 AAC 07.365), which allowed directed commercial chum and coho salmon fishing only when escapement objectives and subsistence needs are being met. The decisions, actions, and recommendations of the Working Group are recorded on paper, on audiotape, and electronically and provided to appropriate government agencies, non-government organizations, and interested members of the public. Records of past Working Group decisions, actions, and recommendations as well as

Working Group history are available in the Bethel ADF&G, Division of Commercial Fisheries (CF) office.

HYPOTHESIS: Facilitation of public involvement in the management of the Kuskokwim River subsistence, commercial, and sport salmon fisheries will improve the management of these fisheries.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of project FIS 01-116 is to strengthen the Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group process by providing funding for:

1. A Coordinator position that will keep Working Group members, federal staff, Regional Advisor Council (RAC) members, and the public informed as well as arrange meeting logistics and record meeting decisions, actions, and recommendations.
2. Travel for the Working Group to meet in-person four times per year.
3. Travel for a Working Group representative to attend BOF, Federal Subsistence Board (FSB), state and federal advisory committee meetings, and other meetings dealing with local salmon fisheries issues.
4. Communications through teleconference, email, FAX, phone, and mail.

METHODS

1. The Coordinator will perform administrative services for the Working Group including:
 - (a) Inform Working Group members about scheduled meetings and meeting agendas through phone, mail, email, and FAX.
 - (b) Assemble, copy, and distribute written materials including meeting announcements, agendas, informational handouts, action statements, and news releases.
 - (c) Set-up Working Group meeting teleconferences.
 - (d) Record meetings and draft meeting minutes.
 - (e) Organize and provide travel logistics for face-to-face meetings and other member travel.
 - (f) Assist with recruitment of members to fill Working Group vacancies.
 - (g) Draft an annual report of Working Group meetings and actions.

2. The Working Group will hold four meetings per year where all members will be able to attend in person. Two meetings will be held in Bethel, and two will be held in Aniak.
3. The Working Group will appoint a member to represent them at BOF, FSB, state and federal advisory committee meetings, and other public meetings dealing with relevant local salmon issues.

RESULTS

The Working Group met 13 times in calendar year 2002 (Appendix 1). The Working Group meets to assist ADF&G with the management of the Kuskokwim River salmon fisheries. The Working Group and ADF&G also work with USFWS to cooperatively manage the Kuskokwim River subsistence salmon fishery. The Working Group now includes a representative from the Y-K Delta RAC and the Western Interior RAC.

At their first meeting in April, the Working Group reviewed the Rebuilding Plan and discussed the subsistence salmon fishing schedule contrived in the Rebuilding Plan, the time allowed for salmon sport fishing and subsistence salmon net fishing, and the prospects for the approaching commercial salmon season. During the two June meetings and the first July meeting, the Working Group continued to review and discuss the Rebuilding Plan and the subsistence salmon fishing schedule and the time allowed for salmon sport fishing and subsistence salmon net fishing. At the June 27 meeting, the subsistence salmon net fishing schedule was increased to seven from four days per week, and the commercial chum salmon (*Oncorhynchus keta*) season was opened. However, because there were no buyers for chum salmon, no commercial fishing periods were ever announced.

During the last July meeting and the six August meetings, coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*) run assessment and management of the commercial coho salmon season dominated the meeting agendas. There were six commercial salmon fishing periods in the Kuskokwim River during this time, and subsistence salmon fishing remained open seven days a week subject to closures around commercial fishing periods.

There were two postseason meetings in September. At these meetings ADF&G presented preliminary season summaries for weir escapements, commercial harvests, and run assessments. At the September 30 meeting, Frank Charles led a discussion about the possible formation of a Kuskokwim River cooperative salmon fishery. As envisioned, the cooperative would produce a steady, but low volume of high quality salmon products at significant cost savings. The cooperative would use the Chignik cooperative salmon fishery as a model. The Working Group unanimously supported the plan as outlined. Frank Charles was funded to attend the BOF meetings in Anchorage, where his Agenda Change Request (ACR) was accepted, and the December BOF meetings in Anchorage, where the Chignik cooperative salmon fishery plan was reviewed. The Working Group also sent member Oscar Larson to the Y-K Delta RAC meeting;

member Charlie Brown to the Western Alaska RAC meeting; and members Nixie Mellick, Evelyn Thomas, and James Charles to the October BOF meetings.

After being hired in June 2002, Coordinator Nora Horn kept Working Group members informed about scheduled meetings and agendas; assembled copied, and distributed meeting announcements, action statements, and news releases; set-up teleconferences; recorded meetings and drafted minutes; organized Working Group member travel; and worked to recruit new members to fill Working Group vacancies.

DISCUSSION

In 1999 after several court cases, the federal government assumed management of subsistence fishing in waters subject to the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), Title VIII. The federal government identified the waters of the Kuskokwim River drainage that flow through the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge as waters of federal interest. Under ANILCA, 16 U.S.C. § 815(3), and its implementing regulations, 36 C.F.R. 242.19(a) and 50 C.F.R. 100.19(a), this arrangement means USFWS is responsible for management of the subsistence salmon fishery in the refuge waters of the Kuskokwim River drainage. The Federal Subsistence Board or USFWS may close fishing for other uses in these waters and implement a priority for federally qualified rural subsistence users if it is determined that state-managed commercial or sport salmon fishing is causing subsistence or conservation concerns.

This new federal management role was superimposed on the existing ADF&G Working Group management scheme. The existing scheme was, and is, enormously complex because of the difficulty in determining run size and timing, the harvesting of mixed stocks, overlapping multi-species salmon runs, allocation issues, and the immense size of the Kuskokwim River drainage. Information is not yet adequate to determine the escapement levels needed to produce maximum sustained yield for the salmon stocks in the Kuskokwim River, and the Kuskokwim River has no formal forecast for salmon returns. Broad year return expectations are developed based on an evaluation of parent-year escapements and trends in harvest and productivity. Most fishers in the Kuskokwim River drainage harvest salmon stocks that are several weeks and hundreds of miles from their spawning grounds. As with most mixed stock fisheries, some individual stocks may be under harvested or over harvested in relation to their abundance. It is not practical, except in a very generalized sense, to manage the stocks separately based on current knowledge (Burkey et al. 2002). In addition, the cooperative management of salmon in the Kuskokwim River must also reconcile broader mandates of fishery management in the region and the changing status of fisheries markets, regulatory authority, and stock strength (Mundy 1995).

In 2001, during the second salmon season of Working Group, USFWS, and ADF&G cooperative management of the subsistence fishery, the Rebuilding Plan was initiated. The Rebuilding Plan was followed again in 2002. It guided management of the Kuskokwim River salmon fisheries. Salmon runs were managed to achieve escapement objectives, to meet amounts necessary for subsistence, and to allow commercial fishing on harvestable surpluses as escapement objectives

and subsistence needs were met. Inseason management decisions were based on salmon run abundance and timing indicators including the Bethel Test Fishery, subsistence harvest reports, tributary escapement monitoring projects, and, when available, commercial catch per unit effort data. Run timing models were used inseason to predict the final escapement using the historical percentage of run passage for a particular date.

FIS 01-116 funding has augmented and fostered the central role the Working Group plays in evaluating and implementing conservation and management measures that directly affect and benefit subsistence, commercial, and sport fishers in the Kuskokwim River drainage.

CONCLUSION

As pressures on Kuskokwim River salmon stocks steadily grow because of increasing numbers of users, especially as the human population in the Kuskokwim River drainage continues to swell, management of the salmon stocks becomes increasingly difficult. Subsistence salmon management on the Kuskokwim solely by ADF&G has evolved into cooperative management with the Working Group and with USFWS. This cooperative management process is advantageous because it allows stakeholders to gather with fishery managers to discuss and make recommendations regarding run assessments and management decisions as the salmon season progresses. By incorporating participation in the management from all spectra of salmon users, better decisions are made and better management is fostered. By funding a Working Group Coordinator, facilitating communications, and funding relevant travel for Working Group members; the FIS 01-116 support grant enhances the management of salmon on the Kuskokwim River in general and of the subsistence salmon fishery in particular.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The largest deviation from the initial proposal has been the difficulty in having two in-person meetings per year in Aniak. This situation might be alleviated by:

1. Declaring the first Working Group meeting in July and the first post-season Working Group meeting each year as standing Aniak meetings.
2. Providing a \$50 stipend to each Working Group member who attends the Aniak meeting in addition to travel and per diem expenses.

While the Working Group normally has adequate in-person and teleconference attendance to establish a quorum, it is generally difficult to muster total in-person attendance even in Bethel because most members are actively engaged in other pursuits at their distant villages and because meetings are so pervasive in the Kuskokwim region nowadays (see Objective two and section two above in Methods). For example, during the summer most members are busy with fishing

activities or summer projects at their homes or fish camps, and by fall many are preparing for moose season or hunting. The Coordinator consistently makes travel to meetings available to Working Group members, but paying members an in-person stipend might encourage better in-person attendance.

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Table 1. Subsistence Salmon Harvest Summary, Kuskokwim River 2001.										
			CHINOOK		CHUM		SCKEYE		COHO	
	HOUSEHOLDS		Reported	Estimated	Reported	Estimated	Reported	Estimated	Reported	Estimated
COMMUNITY	Total	Contacted	Harvest	Total	Harvest	Total	Harvest	Total	Harvest	Total
Tuntutuliak	74	62	2,460	2,993	2,140	2,621	1,407	1,701	276	337
Eek	67	55	1,342	1,728	267	347	719	923	160	207
Kasigluk	135	18	294	588	275	550	160	320	172	344
Nunapitchuk	103	83	2,286	3,250	3,311	4,749	1,824	2,583	268	392
Atmautluak	52	45	657	740	1,201	1,350	849	958	331	369
Napakiak	75	49	2,018	2,290	1,515	1,723	1,642	1,861	565	644
Napaskiak	79	55	4,310	4,662	2,219	2,399	3,168	3,428	430	466
Oscarville	15	0	1,317	1,753	1,373	2,097	1,088	1,620	36	42
Bethel	1,739	1,258	13,056	27,209	5,429	11,319	7,539	15,709	7,180	14,949
Kwethluk	144	95	4,842	6,127	3,450	4,365	3,130	3,960	1,333	1,688
Akiachak	123	84	4,416	6,445	1,960	2,872	2,938	4,300	1,118	1,633
Akiak	59	40	2,953	3,369	1,834	2,093	1,682	1,916	498	564
Tuluksak	76	56	1,984	2,451	1,507	1,862	1,424	1,759	786	971
LOWER KUSKOKWIM	2,741	1,900	41,935	63,605	26,481	38,347	27,570	41,038	13,153	22,606
Lower Kalskag	63	42	1,899	2,181	1,149	1,316	722	824	472	539
Upper Kalskag	56	38	865	1,014	1,151	1,187	253	304	407	416
Aniak	169	148	2,013	2,524	1,585	1,982	1,773	2,223	1,528	1,906
Chuathbaluk	29	26	540	627	2,033	2,338	465	537	470	541
MIDDLE KUSKOKWIM	317	254	5,317	6,346	5,918	6,823	3,213	3,888	2,877	3,402
Crooked Creek	31	24	486	508	897	943	455	476	67	70
Red Devil	14	9	175	175	335	335	361	361	427	427
Sleetmute	34	29	423	473	293	328	838	940	403	452
Stony River	15	3	134	139	140	143	131	138	346	347
Lime Village	17	4	218	262	569	683	1,263	1,516	492	590
McGrath	113	94	312	360	179	199	203	244	333	420
Takotna	17	16	4	5	6	8	0	0	20	26
Nikolai	29	26	245	282	56	65	0	0	143	165
Telida	2	0	0	—	0	—	0	—	0	—
UPPER KUSKOKWIM	272	205	1,997	2,204	2,475	2,704	3,251	3,675	2,231	2,497
TOTALS	3,330	2,359	49,249	72,155	34,874	47,874	34,034	48,601	18,261	28,505
NOTE: If fewer than 30 households in a community or less than 50% of households in a community stratum were contacted, then reported harvest is used for estimated harvest. Data includes salmon retained for subsistence use from commercial catch. Blanks indicate that no estimate is available										

(from: Burkey et al. 2002)

Appendix 1. Summary of Working Group, USFWS, and ADF&G actions, decisions, and recommendations in 2002.



**KUSKOKWIM RIVER SALMON
MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP
MEETINGS IN 2002**



Date	Comment
15 April	<p>Frank Charles and Wayne Morgan were elected co-chairs. Carl Morgan was selected as the alternate for the Western Interior Federal Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (RAC) position. The ADF&G presented the 2001 Kuskokwim River summary, the 2002 Kuskokwim River outlook and an outline of new cooperative projects in the drainage in 2002. The Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group (Working Group) recommended a Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday subsistence salmon closure under the Kuskokwim River Salmon Rebuilding Management Plan (Rebuilding Plan), and it also recommended that sport fishing be allowed only when subsistence net fishing is allowed. No action was taken on a Special Action request to limit sport fish opportunity in federal waters or on the issuance of a cooperative appeal to conserve salmon.</p>
18 June	<p>Frank Charles, Kuskokwim Fisherman's Co-op representative, chaired the meeting. Nora Horn, newly hired coordinator for the Working Group, was introduced. The Working Group heard reports on the False Pass fishery, subsistence fishing, and the ADF&G's in-season indicators.</p> <p><u>ADF&G RECOMMENDATION:</u> The four-day per week subsistence fishing schedule, as detailed in the Rebuilding Plan, will remain in effect. USFWS concurs.</p> <p><u>WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATION:</u> Accepted the ADF&G recommendation.</p> <p><u>ACTUAL OUTCOME:</u> Subsistence salmon net and fish wheel fishing remained closed on Sundays, Mondays, and Tuesdays.</p>
27 June	<p>Wayne Morgan, middle river subsistence fisher representative, chaired the meeting. The Working Group heard reports on the False Pass June fishery, Kuskokwim River subsistence salmon fishing, and the ADF&G in-season indicators. A rather long meeting developed as the Working Group grappled with developing a position in reaction to the Federal Subsistence Board's (FSB) linkage of sport fishing time to subsistence fishing time in federal waters of the Kuskokwim River.</p> <p><u>ADF&G RECOMMENDATION:</u> In-season indicators of run strength show sufficient harvest abundance to allow a commercial chum salmon fishery in the</p>

Kuskokwim River. Therefore, the ADF&G recommendation is that the commercial chum season be opened in the Kuskokwim River and that subsistence salmon fishing be allowed, except for the standard closures around commercial fishing periods, seven days a week in the Kuskokwim River drainage. This recommendation would become effective June 30. ADF&G/USFWS will continue to closely evaluate run strength. Should run strength begin to falter, it may be necessary to close the commercial fishing season and go back to a reduced subsistence salmon fishing schedule. USFWS agrees with this recommendation.

WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATION: (1) Requested the ADF&G restrict sport fishing in state waters in a manner similar to FSB's restrictions on sport fishing in federal waters. The FSB action tied sport fish openings to subsistence net and fish wheel fishing openings. Prior to this action, salmon sport fishing in federal waters had been open seven days a week while subsistence salmon net and fish wheel fishing in federal waters had been open four days per week. Subsistence rod and reel fishing had remained open seven days per week at all times, however. (2) Requested that ADF&G conduct an environmental impact study on the effects of boat traffic on salmon spawning grounds in state waters of the Kuskokwim River drainage.

ACTUAL OUTCOME: On June 28, the ADF&G opened the commercial chum salmon season, but a commercial fishing period was not announced because there was no processor interest. The opening of the commercial fishing season triggered the abandonment of the Rebuilding Plan subsistence schedule, and subsistence salmon fishing reverted to seven days a week in the entire Kuskokwim River drainage.

16 July Frank Charles chaired the meeting. Working group members, processors, and ADF&G staff had a lengthy discussion about the approaching coho season and the potential for harvest exceeding processing capacity. New options were considered for fishing time, fishing areas, numbers of periods per week, and subsistence fishing time. Evelyn Thomas replaced Nixie Mellick as the sport fish representative, and Nixie Mellick replaced Andrew Gusty in the upriver subsistence seat.

ADF&G RECOMMENDATION: In-season indicators of run strength continue to indicate sufficient harvest abundance to allow a commercial chum salmon fishery in the Kuskokwim River. Therefore, the ADF&G recommendation is that the Kuskokwim River drainage remains open to subsistence fishing seven days per week, except for the standard closures around commercial fishing periods, if there are any. At this time it is very unlikely that there will be any buyers for chum salmon. ADF&G/USFWS will continue to closely evaluate run strength. Should run strength begin to falter, it may be necessary to go back to a reduced subsistence salmon fishing schedule. USFWS agrees with this recommendation.

WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATION: Accepted the ADF&G recommendation.

ACTUAL OUTCOME: The commercial season remained open, no commercial periods were announced, and subsistence salmon fishing remained open seven days a week.

- 29 July Wayne Morgan chaired the meeting. The ADF&G recommended, and the Working Group concurred, that Frank Charles remain on the Working Group representing the dissolving Kuskokwim Fishermen's Coop through at least the coho season. He will also retain his position as co-chair through at least the coho season.
- ADF&G RECOMMENDATION: In the Kuskokwim River, chum salmon abundance is sufficient to provide for escapement and subsistence needs, and coho salmon relative abundance exceeds chum salmon relative abundance. In this situation, the Rebuilding Plan directs the ADF&G to manage the commercial salmon fishery based on strength of the coho salmon run. Coho salmon run strength is assessed using the following in-season indicators: Bethel Test Fishery data, subsistence fishing reports, weir project information, and coho CPUE statistics. At this point in the season, the Bethel Test Fishery is the main in-season indicator, and it is indicating an above average run of coho salmon and a better coho run than last year. Therefore, with limited processing capacity in mind, the ADF&G recommendation is a two-hour commercial fishing period from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. on Friday, August 2 in Subdistrict 1-B. USFWS concurs with this recommendation.
- WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATION: Accepted the ADF&G recommendation.
- ACTUAL OUTCOME: A two-hour commercial fishing period from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. on Friday, August 2 in Subdistrict 1-B.
- 4 August Frank Charles chaired the meeting. There was an abbreviated continuing business session, and then the Working Group considered the ADF&G recommendation.
- ADF&G RECOMMENDATION: At this point in the season, the Rebuilding Plan directs the ADF&G to manage the commercial salmon fishery based on the strength of the coho salmon run. Coho salmon run strength is assessed using Bethel Test Fishery data, subsistence fishing reports, escapement information, and coho CPUE statistics. These indicators at this time show a commercially harvestable surplus of coho salmon over and above the coho salmon needed for escapement and subsistence. While the ADF&G is concerned about the high catchability of salmon with the very low river level, this concern is offset by the extremely low level of fishing effort seen in the last opening and the good commercial surplus of coho salmon. Therefore, the ADF&G recommendation is a four-hour commercial fishing period from 3:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. on Monday, August 5 in District 1. USFWS concurs with this recommendation.
- WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATION: Accepted the ADF&G recommendation.
- ACTUAL OUTCOME: A four-hour commercial fishing period from 3:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. on Monday, August 5 in District 1.
- 7 August Frank Charles chaired the meeting. The meeting was called to discuss commercial fishing prospects for the rest of the week. After a lively discussion, the Working Group rejected the ADF&G recommendation, and the ADF&G

accepted the Working Group recommendation. The ADF&G had recommended a district-wide opening because of tender availability, because of overall efficiency, and because it left the door open for a district-wide opening on Saturday.

ADF&G RECOMMENDATION: A six-hour, district-wide fishing period on Thursday, August 8 from 1:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. USFWS concurs.

WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATION: A six-hour fishing period from 1:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. on Thursday, August 8 in Subdistrict 1-A and a six-hour fishing period from 1:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. on Friday, August 9 in Subdistrict 1-B

ACTUAL OUTCOME: The Working Group recommendation was followed.

- 10 August Wayne Morgan chaired the meeting. The meeting was held to hear reports and make a determination on future coho fishing periods. The Working Group was unable to reach a consensus after considering the ADF&G recommendation and after considering a Wednesday/Thursday set of openings for Subdistrict 1-A and 1-B.

ADF&G RECOMMENDATION: At this time, the ADF&G in-season indicators show a commercially harvestable surplus of coho salmon over and above the coho salmon needed for escapement and subsistence. While the ADF&G is concerned because of the very low river level and because of the potential for a large salmon harvest that could overwhelm processors because we are near the normal peak of the coho run, these concerns are offset by the low level of fishing effort and the low harvest levels seen in the first four openings. With these factors in mind, the ADF&G recommendation is a four-hour commercial fishing period in Subdistrict 1-A from 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. on Monday, August 12 and a four-hour commercial fishing period in Subdistrict 1-B from 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday, August 13. USFWS concurs.

WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATION: None.

ACTUAL OUTCOME: A six-hour fishing period from 1:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. in Subdistrict 1-A for Monday, August 12 was announced and a six-hour fishing period from 1:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. in Subdistrict 1-B for Tuesday, August 13 was announced. Because ADF&G had received word of a substantial increase in processing capacity that would be available on August 12 and 13, the fishing periods were extended from four to six hours.

- 14 August Frank Charles chaired the meeting. After the August 12 and 13 commercial fishing periods in Subdistricts 1-A and 1-B, the Working Group met to assess the strength of the coho run and consider options for the next fishing period.

ADF&G RECOMMENDATION: At this time, most of the ADF&G in-season indicators show a commercially harvestable surplus of coho salmon over and above the coho salmon needed for escapement and subsistence. So far this season there has been a low level of fishing effort, harvest levels have been low, and the CPUE has been above or near average. However, a very key in-season indicator, escapement at the six weirs in the Kuskokwim river drainage, is lagging. Therefore, the ADF&G recommendation is to meet again Friday, August 16 at noon to consider a Saturday, August 17 fishing period. USFWS concurs.

WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATION: Since there would be no processing capacity available Saturday, August 17 or Sunday, August 18; the Working Group recommended a meeting on Sunday, August 18 at noon to consider a Monday commercial fishing period.

ACTUAL OUTCOME: The Working Group recommendation was followed.

18 August Because neither co-chair attended the meeting, the ADF&G announced their recommendation, coho run assessment information was presented, and a general discussion followed. The Working Group took no formal action.

ADF&G RECOMMENDATION: In-season coho run abundance indicators show a mixed picture. Bethel Test Fishery data and some subsistence fishing reports show a good coho run abundance. It is possible, however, that the very low river level may be inflating the Bethel Test Fishery numbers. On the other hand, escapement numbers at the six weir sites in the drainage are very low when compared with past years at this date. In the commercial fishery, there have been a low number of fishers participating this season, and a higher CPUE might be expected if this low number of fishers were harvesting an average or above average run. All in all, a below average run appears to be developing. Because of this below average run assessment, and especially because of the very low coho escapement numbers at the weir sites, there does not—at this time—appear to be a surplus of coho salmon over and above escapement needs and the amounts needed for subsistence. Therefore, the ADF&G recommends no commercial fishing at this time, and it recommends another Working Group meeting on Wednesday, August 21 at noon to assess the coho fishery further. The USFWS concurs with this recommendation.

WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATION: None.

ACTUAL OUTCOME: No further commercial fishing periods were announced.

21 August Frank Charles chaired the meeting. The Working Group met to assess the coho run for a possible commercial fishing period, but it was unable to reach a consensus after considering a motion to accept the ADF&G recommendation. The Working Group was also unable to reach a consensus after considering a motion to not accept, but not oppose the ADF&G recommendation.

ADF&G RECOMMENDATION: Because of the continuing below average run assessment, and especially because of the very low coho escapement numbers at the weir sites, there does not—at this time—appear to be a surplus of coho salmon above escapement needs and the amounts needed for subsistence. Therefore the ADF&G recommends no further commercial fishing at this time. The USFWS concurs with this recommendation.

WORKING GROUP RECOMMENDATION: None.

ACTUAL OUTCOME: No further commercial fishing periods were announced.

5 Sept. Wayne Morgan chaired the meeting, which was called to assess coho salmon escapement. Coho escapement at the Tuluksak, Tatlawiksuk, and Takotna weirs was above average; but the escapement at the Kwethluk, George, and Kogrukluks weirs was below average. The Working Group decided to continue this

discussion on September 30 when all the weir data would be complete. There was also some discussion of the salmon fishing cooperative proposed in Agenda Change Request (“ACR”) #28, but Frank Charles (author of the ACR) was absent. The Working Group also discussed members attending other salmon-related meetings, but nothing conclusive was decided.

30 Sept. Frank Charles chaired the meeting. ADF&G provided a season recap during the first part of this four-hour meeting. The 2002 chinook, chum, sockeye, and coho runs were characterized as average, above average, below average, and below average, respectively. The Working Group voted to support the USFWS proposal, which would bring the federal hook-and-line subsistence fishery regulations in line with the state hook-and-line subsistence fishery regulations in District W-2. The Working Group also appointed members to attend the October Western Interior RAC meeting, Y-K Delta RAC meeting, and BOF Work Session. Frank Charles provided a summary of the plan behind ACR #28. The plan would create a fishery characterized by a low volume of higher quality product produced steadily through the summer by a few fishers who would, like all or substantially all permit holders in the drainage, be members of a fishery cooperative. At the end of each season, all permit holders would receive a dividend from the profits of the cooperative. The Working Group voted unanimously to support the ACR as it went before the BOF Work Session.

9 Dec A tentative meeting was scheduled for this date in Aniak to so that Frank Charles could bring the Working Group up to date on the proposed salmon fishing cooperative. However, this meeting was canceled because of complications in formation of the cooperative. No further Working Group meetings were held after September 30, 2002.